

# 1

## An introduction to modern Algerian history and politics

Being Algerian has been described as ‘the most complicated history of citizenship in the world’ (Khanna 2008: 70). Algeria combines an ancient Berber culture with the historical influence of diverse invasions and colonial occupations (Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Arab, Byzantine, Egyptian, Spanish, Ottoman and French). For Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist who worked on Algeria throughout his career, this complex history plus the often dysfunctional relation between the state and the people makes what he calls the Algerian problem ‘la limite extrême de tous les problèmes sociaux et politiques’ [the extreme example of all social and political problems] (Bourdieu 1997: 21). Bourdieu identifies key issues in the recent history of Algeria as originating in the after-effects of colonialism and the war of liberation against the French (1954–62) – he calls the state’s position on both these matters an attempt to repress the repressions that resulted – as well as in the confusions and inconsistencies of a language policy which sought to expunge French from everyday use amongst the subordinate classes but kept it alive among the elites (Bourdieu 1997: 22). The complex inter relation of Arabic and French informs the very name of the territory, since the French term *l’Algérie* was itself derived from the Arabic *El Djezaïr* meaning ‘the islands’. The language question is just one of the repercussions of Algerian history that reverberate to this day. But the French colonial occupation of Algeria from 1830 onwards was far from the first, nor did Algerian history begin with the arrival of the French as some colonial discourse suggested. Previous attempts to control North African territories had been made by the Carthaginians (largely unsuccessful) and more successfully by the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks. Resistance was led by the indigenous Berber population, the oldest

community in Algeria. As Kateb Yacine puts it in his novel *Nedjma*, the tree of the nation is rooted in an ancient tribal grave (Yacine 1996: 200). Berber figures such as Jugurtha, a Numidian king who fought the Romans, were subsequently venerated in the nationalist discourse of modern independent Algeria. Even in the Arab-dominated, officially Muslim independent Algeria, the Berber pagan Jugurtha was invoked in the 1976 National Charter as representing the origin of the nation (Evans and Phillips 2007: 15). A Berber presence has been a constant in Algerian history throughout the waves of invasion and occupation. Berbers now make up between 20 and 30 per cent of the current population of 35 million, with their most long-standing communities concentrated in particular regions including in the east Kabylia and the Aurès mountains, and to the south the Mzab and the nomadic Tuaregs of the Sahara Desert (see Change 2009: 19). Modern Algeria is however officially an Islamic state and its national language is Arabic: both legacies of the Arab invasion that began in 647.

Sunni Islam is the official religion of Algeria, and Muslims account for 99 per cent of the current population (see Change 2009: 35). Official nationalist discourse hence tends to portray the Arabisation and Islamisation of Algeria as central to the country's history. Seen through this optic, the seventh-century defeat of the Berber resistance – led by the Jewish queen Dihaya Kahina – and the subsequent conversion of the Berber tribes to Islam 'came to symbolize the inevitable triumph of Islam' and 'the formation of an Arabo-Islamic identity' central to state discourse on nation formation (see Evans and Phillips 2007: 17). The adoption of Islam by the Berbers did not however unproblematically synthesise Arab and Berber identities, nor did Arab culture become strongly established in Algeria until the eleventh century. The earlier Arabisation of the Machrek (eastern North Africa) by invasion from the Middle East meant that pre-Arabic languages in that region disappeared very early. By contrast, the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) was only fully Arabised after the invasion of the Banu Hillal tribe in 1051; this saw the loss of Roman dialect, but the major pre-Arabic language, Berber and its variants, remained and have survived to the present day (see Niehoff 1997: 50). A resultant sense of rupture has been identified between the Arab majority in Algeria and Arab nations in the Middle East, whereby Algerian Arabs can feel cut off from the perceived centre of Arab-Islamic culture. Meanwhile the marginalisation of Berber languages and culture by the modern Algerian state remains a crucial issue, one reflected

in the struggle to develop a Berber cinema within Algeria (see Chapter 5).

If Algeria during the medieval period was ruled by powerful religious dynasties, such as Islamic Berbers, the Almoravids and the Almohads, in the sixteenth century it was taken over by the Ottoman Empire, an occupation that saw the era of the so-called Barbary Pirates, operating out of Algiers. As Marnia Lazreg has noted, 'Europeans referred to Algerian ship activity [. . .] as "piracy", thereby obscuring the fact that it was initially a response to the Spanish *reconquista* with its attendant expulsion of Muslims to North Africa [. . .] and attempts at seizing Algerian ports' (Lazreg 1994: 22). The country was administered as a regency, not from Constantinople but from Algiers, by the Turkish military elite headed by the *dey* or head of state. As a result, when the city ultimately surrendered to the French in 1830, the declaration was made not in Arabic or Berber, nor indeed in French – the language of the the future occupation – but in Turkish (see Djebbar 2000: 228). Prior to the French invasion, Algiers had begun to suffer from impoverishment and depopulation. In fact, the diplomatic incident used as a partial justification for military action by France – the *dey* of Algiers striking the French consul-general with a fan in April 1827 – was an expression of frustration at France's reluctance to pay debts owed to the Regency. A French blockade of three years followed, and ultimately the expedition of 14 June 1830 in which 37,000 French troops landed at Sidi-Ferruch. By 5 July Algiers had been captured. An ulterior motive for this action was provided by French domestic politics. Ahead of the elections due for July 1830, the Bourbon monarchists wished to shift attention from internal conflicts while bolstering their own popularity via a military success. Charles X mobilised the rhetoric of religious conflict along with nationalism in his address to parliament on 2 March 1830, when he contrasted the Barbary power of Algiers with a France aided by the Almighty and championing the triumph of Christianity (see Vigier 1991: 16). When the French colonial presence in Algeria was itself questioned in the twentieth century by Sheikh Ben Badis, then attacked and ultimately defeated in the 1954–62 war, religion was again to play a key part in the construction of a nationalist cause – in this case, a Muslim Algerian cause (see below and Chapter 3).

The fall of Algiers did not achieve all that the French had wished for. News reached Paris too late to prevent the defeat of the Bourbon faction in the elections and the turmoil of the July Revolution.

Meanwhile, Algerian resistance remained. The coastal towns of Oran and Annaba were quickly occupied, but it took thirty years and hundreds of thousands of men before the territory of Algeria was 'pacified' by the French. The most successful resistance leader was Abd el-Kader, who inflicted defeats on the French during the 1830s and surrendered only in 1847. During this time not only did the size of the French military presence in Algeria increase (from 72,000 troops in 1841 to over 100,000 in 1846) but so did the brutality of their campaign. Led by Thomas Bugeaud, the army began to disrupt and control indigenous activities such as farming, following his order to 'empêcher les Arabes de semer, de récolter, de pâturer sans notre permission' [prevent the Arabs from sowing, harvesting, or feeding their animals without our permission] (cited in Michel 1991: 24). More infamously the French under Bugeaud also committed atrocities and massacres, notably by means of 'enfumades', when villagers were suffocated by smoke after being shut up in caves. Thanks to such tactics, by 1857 the conquest of Algeria was complete, although rebellions were to recur periodically.

As early as 1847, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed how France had plunged Algeria into darkness: 'nous avons rendu la société musulmane beaucoup plus misérable, plus désordonnée, plus ignorante et plus barbare qu'elle n'était avant de nous connaître' [we have made Muslim society much more wretched, wild, ignorant and barbarous than it was before it encountered us] (cited in Michel 1991: 25). The imposition of French colonialism on Algeria has been described by Bourdieu as a shock of such magnitude that it ruptured 'not only the economic order but also the social, psychological, moral and ideological' (cited in Silverstein and Goodman 2009: 15). The reduction of Algerians to second-class citizens in their own country, the removal of Algerian land (often tribally rather than individually owned) from Algerian hands, the placing of political, legal and economic power in the hands of European settlers and the brutal 'pacification' of Algerian rebellions were all part and parcel of the colonial system. But beyond these material deprivations the Algerians also suffered, according to Bourdieu, the loss of 'something that they could never recover: their cultural unity' (cited in Silverstein and Goodman 2009: 16). Moreover, as Lazreg comments, 'From now on, Algerians will be figments of the French imagination' (Lazreg 1994: 36). As we shall see in the course of this book, an attempt to wrest Algerian identity away from colonial constructions, as well as a

mythologising of lost national unity (and a critique of this nostalgic idea), is central to much Algerian cinema.

The French in Algeria were conscious of previous imperial structures notably those imposed by the Roman Empire. Indeed the French colonial project sought to emulate Rome's 'civilising' discourse by establishing one European empire on the ruins of another, with which the French shared a Latin identity. This ideology found physical manifestation in the building of a new French bridge on the ruins of a collapsed Roman one at El-Kantara near Constantine, or in 1838 building from scratch – on the site of an ancient Roman port – the town of Philippeville, 'the first entirely French town in Algeria' (Zarobell 2010: 117). A certain amount of the French colonial system in Algeria was also calqued upon inherited Ottoman structures: hence the use of 'compliant local leaders' in the roles of *caïds* (tax collectors), *cadis* (judges) and *bachagas* (tribal leaders) (Evans and Phillips 2007: 30) – figures often represented as collaborators in Algerian cinema, as in *Les Hors la loi* or *La Montagne de Baya* (see Chapters 3 and 5). But whereas Constantinople had left Algeria to be administered at arm's length, the ultimate phase of the French colonial project was to declare Algeria part of France itself: 'With the advent of the Third Republic (1871), northern Algeria was divided into three French departments – Algiers, Oran and Constantine – that were in principle governed by the same laws as metropolitan France. The Algerian Sahara remained under military jurisdiction' (Colonna 2009: 90, n.10). This legal change did nothing to prevent the so-called 'underdevelopment' of Algeria. Political power and material resources (notably the best agricultural land) were in the hands of European settlers known as *pièds-noirs* – predominantly French, but also Spanish and Maltese. The result was to drive the indigenous Algerian tribes further into remote or infertile areas (the mountains or the desert), where the hardships associated with a struggle for subsistence only increased. The land-grab was accelerated by official policy in the aftermath of unsuccessful Algerian revolts, when the state confiscated land held by the rebels: hence 450,000 hectares were removed from Algerian tribal ownership after the suppression of a rebellion led by Moqrani in 1871. A combination of official annexations and shady private deals meant that during a century of colonialism, from the 1830s to the 1930s, an estimated 7.7 million hectares, or 40 per cent of Algerian-held territory, was transferred to European hands (Droz 1991: 43).

Not all Algerians were conceived as the same in French colonial eyes. The so-called 'Kabyle myth' of the late 1800s suggested that the Berber communities based in Kabylia were more assimilable to French values than their Arab counterparts (see Chapter 5). It has been noted that the Kabyle myth 'was preceded by a successful "Jewish mythology" that initiated policies based on the "fact" that Jews were less "barbaric" than Muslims' (Schreier 2006: 116). The requirement for Muslims in Algeria to renounce their religion in order to gain French citizenship was not applied in the same way to Jews, since 'By the 1840s, Jews were submitted to a separate legislation from Muslims, and in October 1870 the government naturalized Algerian Jews en masse' (Schreier 2006: 101). This was the famous *décret Crémieux* which, despite officially granting the thirty thousand or so Algerian Jews French citizenship, did not prevent them from being targeted by an anti-semitism described as one of the essential characteristics of the colonial mentality during the Third Republic (see Ageron 1991: 56). Particularly around the turn of the century, several anti-Jewish leagues were established in cities such as Algiers and Constantine, contesting the *décret Crémieux* – which was ultimately abolished by the Vichy government as soon as it came to power in 1940. It is notable however that, despite incitement from the colonisers' anti-Jewish lobby, Muslim Algerians tended not to target their Jewish neighbours, who for all their religious differences shared the same language, neighbourhoods and even names (see Ageron 1991: 56). Racial tensions did however emerge briefly in 1943 in Constantine, and more regularly during the struggle for independence which, as we shall see, was formulated above all as a Muslim cause. Indicative of Algeria's long-standing ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, the Jewish community remained much less visible than Arabic or Berber communities in Algerian culture and cinema after independence.

The colonial division of Algerian territory – whether originally in Arab, Berber or Jewish hands – can be characterised as threefold: firstly, *quadrillage*, that is to say the military 'occupation and control of the entire geographical space'; secondly, the forced dispossession of fertile Algerian land, and the development of a certain modern infrastructure, both to the benefit of the *pieds-noirs*; and thirdly, the concomitant massive disparity between the northern cities and the *bled* or rural interior, between 'the advanced urban and European-dominated societies' established around Algiers, Oran and Constantine, and the 'underdeveloped interior in which 70 per cent of Algerians

lived in abject poverty as peasants and nomads' (MacMaster 2009: 9, 10). The resultant pauperisation of the Algerian population was exacerbated by famines, epidemics, a rural exodus, massive unemployment – all of which are referenced in the epic film *Chronique des années de braise* (see Chapter 2) – and at the same time by a surge in demographic growth in the twentieth century, which saw the non-European population almost double in two generations from 4.5 million in 1914 to 8.5 million in 1954 (Droz 1991: 43). This period of demographic growth in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s also saw a crystallisation of Algerian nationalism around several factions and charismatic leaders, notably Sheikh Ben Badis and Messali Hadj. The former is renowned for his 1936 *déclaration nette* in which he asserted that Algeria would never assimilate into the French nation:

cette nation algérienne musulmane n'est pas la France; il n'est pas possible qu'elle soit la France. [. . .] c'est une nation totalement éloignée de la France, par sa langue, par ses moeurs, par ses origines ethniques, par sa religion [this Muslim Algerian nation is not France; it is not possible that it ever be France. It is a nation entirely removed from France, by its language, its customs, its ethnic origins and its religion]. (cited in Ageron 1991: 89)

Islam was central to this vision of nationalism. Ben Badis had set up the AOMA (Association des oulémas musulmans algériens) in 1931, aimed at politicising Algerian opinion through a system of reformed Islamic schools, sports clubs and cultural activities. His anti-colonialist, Arabo-Islamic credo was succinctly expressed in the slogan 'L'Islam est ma religion. L'Arabe est ma langue. L'Algérie est mon pays' [Islam is my religion. Arabic is my language. Algeria is my country] (see Ageron 1991: 90). As incorporated into the post-1962 Algerian state, this credo was to be used to exclude non-Arab identities, principally Berbers, from official definitions of nationalism. Contemporaneous with the AOMA of Ben Badis were the two organisations established by Messali Hadj, first the communist-derived L'Etoile nord-africaine, then, after the latter was shut down by the French in 1929, the PPA (Parti du peuple algérien). Hadj too used powerful nationalist rhetoric, declaring that 'l'Algérie ne fut jamais française, elle n'est pas française, elle ne sera jamais française' [Algeria is not French, never was French, never will be French] (see Ageron 1991: 91). The green and white flag of L'Etoile nord-africaine was eventually adopted as the Algerian national flag. But Hadj was denied a place in the negotiation of a

post-independence Algerian state, principally because during the war against the French he rejected the dominant revolutionary force, the FLN (Front de libération nationale), and established a rival organisation, the MNA (Mouvement national algérien). From 1957 onwards it was the FLN rather than the MNA which gained supremacy in the Algerian revolution.

The Algerian war or Algerian revolution began with an insurrection in the Aurès mountains in the east of the country on 1 November 1954. The struggle was fuelled by versions of nationalism often derived from Hadj or Ben Badis, memories of the French massacres of civilians at Sétif in 1945 (described by the PPA as 'genocide') and also the increasingly brutal French reprisals against rebel activity – from the killing of over a thousand Algerians after the death of 71 Europeans in August 1955 to the infamous torture techniques such as *la gégène* (electric shocks). Despite the focus on urban conflict (and on the French use of torture) in the most well-known representation of the war, *La Bataille d'Alger* (see Chapter 3), the revolution was in fact 'predominantly a peasant-based phenomenon'; French control was strongest in the urban centres and weakest in the underdeveloped *bled* where over half of the country's 8.7 million Muslims lived (MacMaster 2009: 28–9). Europeans made up only 0.3 million of Algeria's 9 million population, and were heavily dependent on military, administrative and material investment from mainland France, combined with a political and legal system that denied representation and rights to the Muslim majority. This disparity extended to education, so that 'On the eve of the war in 1954, while virtually all European children aged six to fourteen years received primary schooling, this was true for only one in five Algerian boys, and one in sixteen girls' (MacMaster 2009: 29). One of the major achievements of the post-independence regime, although not one translated into employment figures, was a massive increase in the education of Algeria's children, especially girls: between 1954 and 1987 the education of Algerian girls aged six to fourteen had risen from below 10 per cent to 71.5 per cent (MacMaster 2009: 370). The importance of the rural peasantry in supporting the revolution had certain negative consequences. According to Assia Djebar, the FLN purges led by Colonel Amirouche during 1958–59 targeted young, urban, French-speaking volunteers such as students, leaving up to three thousand activists dead: 'The hunt is on: death to the students who have joined up in massive numbers, to the intellectuals coming from the cities to fuse their revolutionary spirit with that of



the “peasant masses”’ (Djebar 2001: 198). Other key internal schisms divided the FLN leadership from the MNA (which was even on occasion funded by the French) and to some degree from the ALN (the *Armée de libération nationale*), the military wing of the FLN itself. Internal purges and factional conflicts between the revolutionary groups, in which the FLN and its so-called ‘army of the frontiers’ based in Tunisia and Morocco ultimately came out on top, set a pattern of clandestine power struggles, internal repression and civil war, which would resurface in Algeria in the aftermath of independence in 1962, in the ongoing secrecy and repression exercised by the politico-military elite and in the ‘black decade’ of the 1990s (see Chapter 7). As Djebar and others have noted, in the post-1962 one-party state, the FLN exploited the memory of the liberation struggle while denying to the masses the hoped-for liberation from anything other than French rule (for example, in the form of democratic representation, women’s rights, or a share in the country’s energy wealth):

In their speeches they were to invoke the dead on every occasion – by dint of repeating ‘a million dead,’ they paid attention only to quantity, they, the survivors, in the pink of health, becoming more and more at ease year by year, gaining weight, complacency, space, nourishing their bank accounts. (Djebar 2001: 127)

For Bourdieu, the suffering in the war against the French simply reified or made visible the violence at the heart of the colonial system: ‘La guerre fait éclater en pleine lumière le fondement réel de l’ordre colonial, à savoir le rapport de force par lequel la caste dominante tient en tutelle la caste dominée’ [The war brings to light the real foundation of the colonial order, namely the balance of power according to which the dominant class hold dominion over the dominated class] (Bourdieu 1961: 22). Against a modern French army of over four hundred thousand, including two hundred thousand Algerian soldiers (*harkis* and others) fighting with the French, the ALN numbered only fifty thousand fighters. In addition to deaths, torture and atrocities such as rape, the indigenous Algerian population suffered from the French policies of *regroupement* and *déracinement* which during the war saw three million people leaving their home villages – as the protagonist leaves her family home in the 1967 film *Le Vent des Aurès* (see Chapter 3). Forced by the French into internment camps, or fleeing to slums on the edge of the northern cities, Algerians were systematically cut off from their family networks and their larger clan

or tribal connections. By the end of 1960, 24 per cent of the Algerian population were in French camps or 'new villages' (see MacMaster 2009: 242, n.80). Moreover, three hundred thousand refugees were to be found in camps on the Tunisian and Moroccan borders (see Fanon 2001: 224). None the less it should be remembered that thousands of Algerians suffered purges from within the revolutionary movement itself, while French soldiers and European civilians were the target of atrocities. Most notorious was the fate of the *harkis*, Algerian soldiers fighting for the French who were left behind when the latter withdrew in 1962. It is estimated that upwards of ten thousand *harkis* – and perhaps as many as 150,000 – were massacred in postwar purges (see Pervillé 1991: 123). For the war overall, and not counting the *harkis*, French losses are estimated at 25,000 troops plus nearly three thousand civilians. Algerian casualties are much harder to quantify, with the FLN citing the memorable, mythologised figure of a million dead, while official French figures suggest only a tenth of that; an investigation by a team of historians in the 1990s posited the true death toll of Algerians (again, excluding the *harkis*) as between three and four hundred thousand (see Anon. 1991).

The three-year tenure of Ahmed Ben Bella, independent Algeria's first president, has been characterised as 'Social crisis, political opposition, military defeat' – the latter at the hands of Morocco in a border dispute (see Evans and Phillips 2007: 79). In June 1965 a military coup saw Colonel Houari Boumediene (former leader of the army of the frontiers) topple Ben Bella. Under Boumediene, the influence of the military on the Algerian state only increased: 'A partner in 1962, the army was now the arbiter of Algerian politics' (Evans and Phillips 2007: 80). To independent Algeria's socialism was added a plethora of Arabisation policies, the growing influence of hardline Islamic opinion and, after Boumediene's death in 1978, an accommodation with free-market economics. Boumediene's Soviet-inspired socialism can be seen in the Agrarian Revolution of the early 1970s, which attempted to reverse some of the French colonial land-grab by means of 'a redistribution of cultivable lands confiscated from French land-owners [. . .] followed by a series of measures designed to put in place a collectivist use of the land [. . .] in the form of state farms' (Colonna 2009: n.6, 90). It has been claimed that the theoretical foundation for these reforms was also derived in large part from Bourdieu's concepts of the 'de-peasanted peasant', that is to say of Algerian peasantry as dispossessed and alienated by colonialism (see Goodman and

Silverstein 2009: 20). Bourdieu's conceptualising of Algerians as 'forcibly removed from their "enchanted" universe, literally uprooted from their villages' by the shock of colonialism has been construed as unfortunately mirroring and possibly fuelling 'Algeria's post-independence agrarian development politics, which have been based on a related split between a precolonial idyll and a postcolonial peasantry imagined only in terms of loss – broken, backward, and marginal to the Algerian nation, with nothing to offer of its own' (Goodman 2009: 116, 117). Certainly colonial occupation by the French was a major factor in fragmenting Algerian identity, notably through the imposition of the French language as well as the withholding of civil rights and the redistribution of fertile land from Algerians to European settlers – thus in effect literalising this 'uprootedness' (*déracinement*) and forcing peasants to uproot and move to the *bidonvilles* or shanty-towns on the edge of the cities. With the Agrarian Revolution proving unsuccessful, the FLN also attempted to overcome these historical disjunctures by promulgating classical Arabic and by rejecting French – or appearing to reject it.

Outlined in the Tripoli Charter of 1962, Arabisation (*at-Taârib*) was required of Algerian schools from 1965, and led to Arabic signposting in 1976. However, the elites in post-1962 Algeria continued to use French, while condemning the mass of the population to Arabisation policies which often resulted in disenfranchisement, since the classical Arabic demanded was not the language of the Arab street (that was a vernacular Algerian Arabic), and still less the language of the Berber communities (see Chapter 5). Despite its symbolic capital in the newly independent nation, Arabic was largely sidestepped by the political and military elites, such that in the neo-colonial Algeria a schism rapidly opened between 'une culture francophone de bien être social et une culture de misère arabo-berbère' [a French-speaking culture of social well-being and an Arabo-Berber culture of poverty] (Moatassime 1997: 66). This impression was only increased when the law of July 1988 forbade Algerians to attend French-language schools; as a consequence, the moneyed Algerian elite began educating their children in France, Belgium and Switzerland, exacerbating the gulf between the Arab-speaking mass population and a French-speaking elite educated in Europe (see Mengedoht 1997: 86–7, n.49). From 1962 to 1988 – a watershed year in Algerian politics, as we shall see – the key means by which the state sought to paper over the gulf between the elite and the disenfranchised majority was to mobilise

memories of the war against the French. Even before Algerian independence, Frantz Fanon had warned of the rewriting of history as myth by the leaders of ex-colonies: 'The leader pacifies the people [. . .]; we see him reassessing the history of independence and recalling the sacred unity of the struggle for liberation' (Fanon 2001: 135). Fanon continues: 'The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and either persists in expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it' (Fanon 2001: 136). Fanon's prescience even extends to predicting the corruption and self-interest that will accompany the success of the anti-colonial party (in Algeria's case, the FLN regime): 'The party, which during the battle had drawn to itself the whole nation, is falling to pieces. [. . .] The party is becoming a means of private advancement' (Fanon 2001: 137–8). More recently, an equally trenchant critique of postcolonial Algeria has been launched by Ranjana Khanna: 'Algeria set itself up as the avant-garde third world nation that had effectively rid itself of the imperialist machine and was working on an Islamist socialist model', suggesting that it would 'value the work done by men and women alike during the war of independence' (Khanna 2008: xiii). In effect, argues Khanna, Algeria betrayed these ideals and became a neo-colonial state. Neo-colonialism is defined by Shohat and Stam as 'a regeneration of colonialism through other means', a state where 'geo-economic hegemony' repeats the power structures of colonial rule (Shohat and Stam 1994: 40). In Algeria this meant a one-party state that concentrated power in the hands of a shadowy but massively influential politico-military elite while – despite advances in education, as mentioned above – the rights of minoritarian groups (principally women and Berbers) were repressed and the vast majority of the population remained in poverty and unemployment.

The officially secular and socialist nature of the nation-state established after 1962 should not obscure the significance of religion in Algeria. One critique of Bourdieu's massively influential work on Algerian society is his tendency to neglect the importance of Islam. To give one example, his account of Berber culture in Kabylia as predominantly oral rather than written is partly based on an elision of the role of Qur'anic schools and texts in Berber communities (see Goodman 2009). For the first century or so of French occupation, Algerian religious authority had been largely held by the marabouts (saints) who embodied ancient religious folk practices and by the proponents of mystical Sufism – glimpsed in the Berber folk narrative of

*La Montagne de Baya* (see Chapter 5). This form of popular Islam has even been described as enabling 'men and women to live their lives as if they were not colonized', since it allowed Algerians – of both genders – to 'give meaning to their daily existence and establish a sense of continuity with the precolonial past' (Lazreg 1994: 85). By the 1920s, 'both *marabouts* and official *imams* [had] declined in popular legitimacy' since in nationalist eyes they were insufficiently opposed to the French; the stage was set for Islamic reform, led by Sheikh Ben Badis (MacMaster 2009: 42). Ben Badis's famous declaration of 1936 welded together Islam, nationalism and the Arabic language in an anti-colonial vision of Algerian identity. By emphasising the importance of Arabic, this construction of national identity already tended to exclude Berber communities and thus foreshadowed their repression by the nation-state after independence. What is more, Ben Badis attacked popular Sufism in favour of a reformist Islam which restricted the participation of women (see Lazreg 1994: 82). After independence, official policy and discourse continued to equate Islam, Arabic and nationalism. During Boumediene's presidency (1965-78) there was a gradual shift from secular socialism to increasingly pro-Islamic policies: sales of alcohol to Muslims were forbidden, mosque building increased and in 1976 Friday was enshrined as the day of prayer. Under Boumediene the state's ambiguous position, balancing an ostensibly secular socialism with a religious nationalism based on Islamic values and a largely unavowed deference to *sharia* law, was euphemistically termed 'specific socialism' (see Hadj-Moussa 2009: 119). The construction of mosques and Qur'anic schools further increased under Chadli Benjedid in the 1980s, and in 1984 the patriarchal Family Code was passed, influenced by concepts from the *sharia* (see Chapter 4 for a powerful critique of the code in the film *La Citadelle*). The code remains in place, having been amended but not abrogated by President Bouteflika in February 2005 (see Khanna 2008: xiii).

The 1980s saw a repositioning of Algeria away from socialism (even of a 'specific' kind) after Boumediene's death, and is generally viewed as a period of increasing corruption and the alienation of the youth population, in contrast with the more nostalgically remembered Boumediene era. The disjuncture between the Algerian people and the state reached a nadir in Black October of 1988, 'the autumn of the six hundred dead' (Djebar 2000: 140). For the first time in the history of the independent Algeria the violence of the regime became undeniably explicit as the army fired on the people, with hundreds

of protestors killed and many survivors tortured in incarceration. As Ratiba Hadj-Moussa notes, the protests and strikes of autumn 1988 were in part a consequence of liberal economic policies which saw the country's growing energy wealth kept in private hands: 'the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank dictated a regime of progressive liberalization [. . .]. The contradictions of this liberalization translated into the events of October 1988' (Hadj-Moussa 2009: 120). The mythologising of the Algerian revolution in FLN ideology, with its parade of martyrs, was in effect destroyed by the state's own creation of hundreds of young martyrs in Black October:

La jeunesse algérienne [. . .] neutralise, en octobre 1988, par équivalence, le signe fondateur et légitimant du pouvoir nationaliste, 'le sang des martyrs', sa rente symbolique, en versant son propre sang, en subissant la torture et les prisons [In October 1988 Algerian youth neutralised or cancelled out the founding, legitimising sign of nationalist power, its symbolic payment, namely 'the blood of the martyrs', by paying its own blood, by suffering torture and imprisonment]. (Mediene 1992: 72)

In the aftermath of the unrest President Chadli Benjedid offered limited reforms: the constitution of 1989 officially ended the one-party state and gave increased freedom to the media. As regards television, for example, 'Political programs of a new type were aired, in which political opponents were invited to express their views', as 'the national channel echoed the debates among Algerians on taboo subjects, such as corruption' (Hadj-Moussa 2009: 121). But this situation was short-lived. Only three years later the electoral process was shut down, a state of emergency declared, and propaganda, censorship and counter-terror became common practice as the state confronted a rise in Islamic fundamentalism. The catalyst for this reassertion of autocracy was the popularity of the FIS (Front islamique du salut), a party which channelled much of the post-1988 dissent of Algeria's disempowered youth, winning 188 out of 231 seats in the first round of elections in late 1991. By foreclosing the electoral option and criminalising the FIS, the FLN and the army (the latter ensuring Chadli was soon removed) simply drove the movement underground. A sense of generational betrayal also fed the rise of fundamentalist terror. The independent Algerian state had disempowered its massive, overwhelmingly young population while parading a legitimacy based not on democratic representation but on the glorification of the 'martyrs'

who died fighting the French (amongst whom were many covertly killed by the FLN in internecine struggles during and after the war). The state's long and bloody history of oppression and torture of its own people (which, as Djébar explains, began as early as the FLN purges of 1958) fuelled the resentment of Black October and of the black decade that followed. Hence Djébar, writing in the 1990s, found it 'Hardly surprising that the revolt and anger [. . .] of today's "madmen of God" should be directed first and foremost against the cemeteries, against the tombs of the *chahids* [martrys], yesterday's sacrificial victims' (Djébar 2000: 127). A major factor in the rise of the FIS was also clearly the failure of the neo-colonial Algerian state to provide secure, bearable and pluralistic forms of national identity, given the one-party system (at least until 1989 and, in practice, beyond), the suppression of dissent, the massive inequalities, corruption, unemployment and poverty, the refusal of democratisation, the control of power by a politico-military elite, the disenfranchisement of the majority, the inept Arabisation policies used as a means of legitimising the state once the celebration of the liberation struggle had worn thin, and so on. In *Algerian White*, her lament for dead Algerian writers, Djébar cites Jean Genet's assertion about the failings of a memorialising history based on denial: 'A people that is remembered only by periods of glory [. . .] will always be in doubt about itself, reduced to being an empty vessel. The crimes of which it is ashamed are what make its true history' (see Djébar 2000: 83). As Djébar's narrative reveals, the 'empty vessel' of Algerian history after 1962, hollowed out by FLN rhetoric and state terror, was to be filled with the 'black blood' of fundamentalist terror in the 1990s (see Djébar 2000: 39).

The conflict of the 1990s between the state and Islamist terrorist groups such as the GIA (Groupe islamique armé) resulted not just in up to two hundred thousand deaths but also in the internal displacement of a similar number of Algerians and the emigration of up to 450,000 more (see Change 2009: 20). Assassinations, massacres, rapes and counter-terror atrocities spiralled. In June 1992 the reformist president Mohammed Boudiaf was assassinated after only five months in power, possibly with the collusion of the army. In May of the following year two hundred assassinations took place. Among those targeted by the GIA were reformist writers and journalists, including activists for women's rights and for Berber issues. The many victims in the cultural field included the poet Tahar Djaout, killed in 1993, and the singer Cheb Hasni, killed in 1994. By the end of the 1990s,

the bloodshed was finally ebbing and state troops largely in control. When Algeria's current president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was elected in 1999 (with the support of the army) he immediately instituted the Civil Concord, an amnesty for the crimes committed during the black decade (but which still sought to prosecute those involved in massacres, rapes and bomb attacks). As Khanna observes, 'Bouteflika has created a semblance, therefore, of confrontation of violence, but in fact he has simply agreed to forget – performing thereby the amnesia that informs all amnesty laws' (Khanna 2008: 248, n.7). This organised forgetting recalls in some ways the memorialising of the liberation struggle during the 1960s and 1970s (the better to forget those excluded elements such as the MNA, women, Berbers), and it continued in 2005 with the Charter for Peace and Reconciliation. Although by the year 2000 the state had reasserted its power over regions such as the Mitidja plain and the so-called 'triangle of death' south of Algiers, previously controlled by the GIA, unrest continued especially in Kabylia where riots erupted in 2001. For Evans and Phillips, the Algerian state was again 'tottering on the edge of chaos' and 'isolated on the international scene' after its brutal suppression of the 2001 Kabyle protests, but was 'saved' by '9/11' and the subsequent repositioning of Algeria as a friend of the West in the 'war on terror' (see Evans and Phillips 2007: 277). This in turn has strengthened Bouteflika's position in power: he has been elected for a third term.

Questions remain, however, about the legitimacy of his regime. In November 2008, after the constitution was rewritten to permit presidency for life, the newspaper *El Watan* declared 'Algeria is jumping backwards . . . even as society has evolved considerably, having, in just one half-century, confronted three huge tests, those of the colonial yoke, the single party and terrorism' (cited in Anon. 2008: 11). To these concerns one might add the continuing use of torture for terror suspects, and the repression of press freedoms. As a UK government report drily noted in 2009, 'There is no direct censorship, but there are laws in place that can result in imprisonment for insulting or defaming the president, MPs, judges and the army' (Change 2009: 46). The state of emergency established in 1992 – and under which public demonstrations are banned – was still in place at the end of 2010. However, January and February 2011 saw demonstrations against the regime, encouraged by the apparent success of the 'jasmine revolution' in Tunisia and the toppling of Mubarak in Egypt. The reaction of the Algerian state to the so-called Arab Spring was initially



authoritarian and uncompromising, echoing the repression of previous unrest in the years since Black October 1988. A major demonstration set for 12 February was banned by the authorities, and press reports suggested that on the day as many as 28,000 security forces were deployed in Algiers to limit the protests. The resultant clashes saw hundreds of arrests. But in tandem with massive police activity, Bouteflika drew the sting of the embryonic protest movement by lifting, on 24 February 2011, the state of emergency. Nonetheless doubts remain as to the democratic significance of this move. Although welcomed by many politicians in the West, on the ground in Algeria it was felt to be a cynical measure to maintain power and to ensure the continuing privatisation – rather than democratisation – of the state. A cartoon in *El Watan* suggested that such a gesture was like Bouteflika casually throwing a bone to protestors who had wanted an entirely new political system. The relationship between the state and the people is still being contested. It is in this volatile context, and with this troubled history, that film-making continues to take place in Algeria.

## References

- Anon., 'Guerre d'Algérie, combien de morts?', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), p. 107.
- Anon., 'Algerian constitution', *The Independent*, 14 November 2008, p. 11.
- Ageron, Charles-Robert, 'Français, Juifs et Musulmans: l'union impossible', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 52–8.
- Ageron, Charles-Robert, 'Naissance d'une nation', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 86–94.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 'Révolution dans la révolution' (1961), in Bourdieu, *Interventions, 1961–2001: Science sociale & action politique* (Paris: Agone, 2002), pp. 21–8.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 'Dévoiler et divulguer le refoulé', in Joseph Jurt (ed.), *Algérie – France – Islam* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 21–7.
- Change Institute, *The Algerian Muslim Community in England* (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2009).
- Colonna, Fanny, 'The phantom of dispossession: from *The Uprooting* to *The Weight of the World*', in Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 63–93.
- Djebar, Assia, *Algerian White* (translated by David Kelley and Marjolijn de Jager) (New York and London: Seven Stories, 2000).

- Djebar, Assia, *So Vast the Prison* (translated by Betsy Wing) (New York and London: Seven Stories Press, 2001).
- Droz, Bernard, 'Main basse sur les terres', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 34–44.
- Evans, Martin and John Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (translated by Constance Farrington) (London: Penguin Classics, 2001).
- Goodman, Jane E., 'The proverbial Bourdieu: *habitus* and the politics of representation in the ethnography of Kabylia', in Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 94–132.
- Goodman, Jane E. and Silverstein, Paul A. (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
- Hadj-Moussa, Ratiba, 'The undecidable and the irreversible: satellite television in the Algerian public arena', in Chris Berry, Soyoun Kim and Lynn Spigel (eds), *Electronic Elsewheres: Media, Technology, and the Experience of Social Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 117–36.
- Hottinger, Arnold, 'Le pouvoir de l'armée algérienne. Passé, présent et futur', in Joseph Jurt (ed.), *Algérie – France – Islam* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 205–12.
- Khanna, Ranjana, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- Lazreg, Marnia, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).
- MacMaster, Neil, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954–62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
- Mediene, Benamar, 'Un état déconnecté', in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Collection Dossiers, 9: 'La Guerre d'Algérie trente ans après' (1992), pp. 72–3.
- Mengedoht, Ulrike, 'La politique d'arabisation de l'Algérie et ses conséquences sur l'islamisme', in Joseph Jurt (ed.), *Algérie – France – Islam* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 77–93.
- Michel, Marc, 'Une guerre interminable', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue on 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 20–5.
- Moatassime, Ahmed, 'Islam, arabisation et francophonie. Une interface possible à l'interrogation "Algérie – France – Islam?"', in Joseph Jurt (ed.), *Algérie – France – Islam* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 55–75.
- Niehoff, Johannes, 'Identité arabe et acculturation française: l'Algérie entre colonialisme et indépendance', in Joseph Jurt (ed.), *Algérie – France – Islam* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 47–53.

- Pervillé, Guy, 'La tragédie des harkis', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 120–3.
- Schreier, Joshua, "'They swore upon the tombs never to make peace with us": Algerian Jews and French colonialism, 1845–1848', in Patricia Lorcini (ed.), *Algeria and France 1800–2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 101–16.
- Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).
- Silverstein, Paul A. and Jane E. Goodman, 'Introduction: Bourdieu in Algeria', in Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 1–62.
- Vigier, Philippe, 'Qu'allons-nous faire à Sidi-Ferruch?', *L'Histoire*, 140, special issue: 'Le temps de l'Algérie française' (January 1991), pp. 12–18.
- Yacine, Kateb, *Nedjma* (Paris: Editions du Seuil/Points, 1996).
- Zarobell, John, *Empire of Landscape: Space and Ideology in French Colonial Algeria* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).